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Plan to open more consular offices in China

MALAYSIA will open more consulates in China to facilitate issuance of visas to Chinese tourists visiting the country, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said new consular offices will be located in cities with high demand for Malaysian visas.

Chinese arrivals totalled 158,679 in 1997 and 135,743 in 1996. It was reported that arrivals from China increased by 137.2 per cent in the first two months of this year.

Speaking to newsmen after launching Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's book titled "A New Deal For Asia" in Petaling Jaya yesterday, Abdullah said Immigration Department director-general Datuk Aseh Che Mat visited China recently to identify places for the setting up of such offices.

He said the Immigration Department will make an announcement with regard to the new offices soon.

Under the existing arrangement, Malaysia-bound Chinese travellers apply visas at the Malaysian Embassy in Beijing or the Malaysian consulates in Hong Kong and Guangzhou.

Abdullah was asked whether the Government would consider opening up more offices for the issuance of visas in China to boost ties between Malaysia and China.

He was also asked whether the Government would allow Chinese tourists intending to visit Malaysia to obtain visas at entry points.

"We have no problems giving visas to Chinese tourists to enter Malaysia through the KL International Airport in Sepang, Langkawi, Johor Baru or any other entry points.

"However, the Chinese Government wants their citizens to apply for Malaysian visas at their own soil," he said.

Abdullah said as the practice in China was to require outbound Chinese to have visas issued well in advance, it would be a boon to have more consular offices in that country.

On whether the Government will also open more consular offices in other countries as well, Abdullah said this has already been done in several countries but the recent decision to have the additional offices only applies to China.

Abdullah also said Chinese visitors entering Malaysia through a third country such as Indonesia would be given visas at Malaysian entry points.

On the 25th anniversary of Malaysia-China diplomatic ties to be celebrated by the end of this month, Abdullah said Malaysia is pleased that the long-established and cordial ties have benefitted both sides.

"We are happy with the long-established bilateral relations. Such cordial ties stemmed from the strife and cooperation between citizens of both nations."

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